

Washington County, Minnesota

Board of Commissioners - Actions

Actions at the Tuesday, September 6, 2011 Board Meeting

This page is a brief view of the actions taken by the Washington County Board of Commissioners. For further information, please telephone 651-430-6001.

Washington County's mission is to provide quality public services in a cost-effective manner through innovation, leadership, and the cooperation of dedicated people.

Regional Railroad Authority identifies public purpose for old rail line in Hugo

The Washington County Board of Commissioners, sitting as the Washington County Regional Railroad Authority, identified public rail/transit and trail purposes on the abandoned, half-mile Burlington Northern Santa Fe rail line in the City of Hugo at their meeting Sept. 6.

In 1994, Washington County Regional Railroad Authority (WCRRA) purchased 9.5 miles of abandoned rail right-of-way for future transit opportunities and trail use, from 145th Street (old County Highway 8) in Hugo to the Chisago County line. A use agreement between Washington County and the WCRRA allowed the construction and use of the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail on the property.

The WCRRA property and Hardwood Creek Regional Trail ended at 145th Street in Hugo because of continued commercial railroad operation south of this location. Up until the mid-2000s, the BNSF railroad corridor was used for commercial deliveries to 145th Street by the Minnesota Commercial Railway Company. As part of Hugo's redevelopment plan, Frenchman Road (new County Highway 8) was re-aligned and the commercial rail use up to 145th Street was relocated to an industrial park south of 140th Street. With that relocation, rail operation on this segment between 140th Street and 145th Street ceased.

The BNSF Railway Company determined that commercial operations have ceased between 140th Street and 145th Street and that there are no plans for commercial operations in the future. In June 2011, BNSF Railway Company filed a notice to abandon the rail line, which became effective Aug. 11, and will allow BNSF to sell this half-mile segment.

The Washington County 2030 Comprehensive Plan identifies this section of abandoned rail corridor as a property preservation corridor for the Rush Line Corridor and also extension of the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail. To keep the entire abandoned rail segment as one continuous property, the WCRRA authorized the County Attorney to prepare a letter to the Surface Transportation Board that identifies the county's potential public use for future rail/transit and trail.

County will cooperate with Ramsey County for detox services

Washington County will collaborate with Ramsey County to provide state-mandated detoxification services for residents in need of services after the Washington County Board of Commissioners approved an agreement with Ramsey County Sept. 6.

Ramsey County Community Human Services Department is relocating its detoxification center to 402 University Ave. in St. Paul. This new building will house Urgent Care for Adult Mental Health, Chemical Health Assessment and Placement, Detox, and the Second Judicial District Commitment Court. The new building provides an opportunity to improve and coordinate services to individuals experiencing either a mental or chemical health crisis, or both. The goal is to improve the availability of integrated, community-based, chemical and mental health services for this population. Ramsey County intends to serve its own residents, as well as contracting with several other counties for detoxification

services, starting Sept. 19. Detoxification services are provided 24 hours per day, seven days per week, with assessment and referral to appropriate treatment programs. The Detoxification Center is a sub-acute residential facility providing medical monitoring and chemical dependency assessments and screening for individuals who are intoxicated or experiencing withdrawal symptoms.

The rate for use will be \$235 per day.

County receives grant for emergency preparedness

Washington County will receive funds for emergency preparedness, after the County Board entered into an agreement Sept. 6 with the Minnesota Department of Health to receive the funds.

The Cities Readiness Initiative funds for \$206,443 will be used to comply with the state mandate to prepare for and respond to health emergencies in the county, including outbreaks of infectious disease whether naturally occurring or caused by terroristic acts.

The Department of Public Health and Environment has received these funds for a number of years through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's federal program administered by the Minnesota's Department of Health. The funds will continue to allow the Department of Public Health and Environment to plan, train and exercise so as to be ready and able to respond in the event of a health emergency. These activities are also extended to the county's community partners such as local medical providers, school districts, non-profits, police, fire and emergency medical services and other non-profit organizations. The grant period is Aug. 10, 2011, to Dec. 31, 2012.

Sheriff's Office to receive grant for boating safety equipment

The Washington County Sheriff's Office will receive a grant to help pay for a motor and side-scan sonars that will supplement the office's boating equipment. The Washington County Board of Commissioners accepted the grant Sept. 6.

The office will receive \$19,330 from the 2011 Federal Boating Safety Supplemental Equipment Grant for the purchase of equipment that will be used for recreational boating safety activities. The money will purchase a 250-horsepower outboard motor for an existing boat, including installation and rigging, and two side-scan sonars.

Library will use \$65,600 for automated locker compartments

The Washington County Library will purchase 60 automated locker compartments to provide an alternative form of library services, after the Washington County Board of Commissioners agreed to the expenditure Sept. 6.

The money will come from the library's fund balance.

Washington County is purchasing additional automated pick-up locker systems for installation in several locations to facilitate customer access to the library's collection. This purchase is part of the further development of the library's alternative service model throughout the county. Residents are able to request library materials through home computers, or computers provided by the library. Then residents are provided with a number for a locker and a pass code, and are given a time frame in which to retrieve the materials. Materials may also be returned at the locations of the locker.

County will request variance for work on Woodbury Drive

Before work can begin on improving Woodbury Drive, or County State Aid Highway 19, in Woodbury, Washington County will request a variance from the state design standards for traffic lane width. The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved the request at its meeting Sept. 6.

The project involves the expansion of the roadway from two to four lanes, from a quarter-mile south of Bailey Road

(CSAH 18) to Park Crossing, in Woodbury. The project includes construction of separated pedestrian/bicycle paths, installation of right- and left-turn lanes, a raised median, and modifications to the intersection of Woodbury Drive and Bailey Road. County bonds and local funds will be used for the project, which is scheduled to begin construction in 2013.

The existing right-of-way between Bailey Road and Lake Road is 30 feet narrower than other parts of the Woodbury Drive corridor. The narrower right-of-way results in larger potential construction impacts to adjacent ponds, wetlands, and property owners.

Minnesota standard designs call for traffic lanes to be 12 feet wide for this type of roadway. The county is proposing to use 11-foot wide traffic lanes, from Bailey Road to Lake Road, which would reduce construction impacts. These narrower traffic lanes would require a variance from the state design standard. Studies have shown no difference in driving safety with 11-foot-wide streets.

Alternatives to this design that were considered include eliminating a pedestrian/bicycle path or narrowing shoulders, which could decrease safety for some roadway users, or filling additional ponds/wetlands and increase construction impacts to adjacent property owners.

Request will be made for the reallocation of transit funds

The Washington County Board of Commissioners will send a request to the Metropolitan Council asking that state bond money currently allocated to the Gateway Corridor from the 2011 legislative session be directed instead to the Newport Transit Center construction project. The request was approved at the board's meeting on Sept. 6.

As part of the 2011 state legislative session, \$20 million in state general obligation bonds was allocated towards the Transit Capital Improvement Program. The language included in the bill identified nine specific transit projects or transitways on which the bond funds could be used.

For Washington County transitways, Rush Line, Gateway and Red Rock Corridors were all identified. The Metropolitan Council has prepared a recommendation for the use of those bond funds to Rush Line Corridor for \$2 million to be allocated to the Maplewood Mall park-and-ride expansion; for \$500,000 for the construction of the Newport transit station; and for \$1.25 million for a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the Gateway Corridor.

Part of the Metropolitan Council's recommendation allowed for the state bonds funds for the Gateway Corridor to be reallocated to the Newport transit center conditional upon Washington County allocating the same amount in its Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB) funding to the Gateway Corridor for accelerating and moving Gateway Corridor into the next phase of development after the completion of the Alternatives Analysis.

County will request transit funds from CTIB for 2012

Washington County will submit applications for funds from the Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB) to fund transit projects in the county for 2012. The County Board approved the request at its meeting Sept. 6.

Grant applications for 2012 will request \$2.125 million to complete a draft environmental impact statement on the Gateway Corridor and \$630,000 for acquisition of abandoned railroad right-of-way in Hugo.

Since April 2008, five counties – Anoka, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey and Washington – have utilized a quarter-cent sales tax and a \$20 a motor vehicle sales tax, permitted by the Minnesota Legislature, to invest in and advance transitway projects by awarding annual capital and operating grants. The CTIB works in collaboration with the Metropolitan Council and Carver and Scott counties.

The CTIB will make \$125 million available for grants to meet its operating and capital funding commitments in 2012, an additional \$7.8 million as required by the State Legislature, and up to a maximum of \$22 million for capital grants to specific corridors to accelerate transitway development.

As part of the approved Transit Investment Framework for CTIB, Washington County is eligible for grants of at least 3 percent of the estimated total annual sales tax proceeds for the years 2010 through 2013. For 2012, the 3 percent guarantee Washington County is eligible for is \$2.7. In addition to the 3 percent, Washington County deferred \$2.3 million from the 2010 solicitation for Washington County's transitway priorities in 2012. With the 3 percent guarantee and the 2011 deferral, the amount available to Washington County is \$5 million for grants payable in 2012.

County Board supports a 'Moment of Remembrance' Sept. 11

The Washington County Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution Sept. 6 recognizing the "Moment of Remembrance" marking the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the United States Sept. 11, 2001.

During the "Moment of Remembrance," every person across the country is asked to stop and remember those lost in the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States. The "Moment of Remembrance" will take place for one full minute at noon Central Daylight Time Sept. 11. Sirens and bells will sound and will be a signal for each person to stop and remember the people lost and demonstrate the perseverance the American people have shown since that fateful day.

Discussion on 2012 budget continues for county board

Budget presentations by individual departments continued before the Washington County Board Aug. 23, after the board heard an overview of the 2012 budget Aug. 9. The 2012 budget presented by the Office of Administration would reduce the county's portion of the property tax, as well as the county's operating expenditures. This is the second year in a row in which the county has not raised its portion of the property tax.

The proposed budget shows a decrease in operating expenditures to \$139.8 million, a decrease of 4.1 percent from 2011. The county has also experienced a reduction in state aid payments of \$11.6 million over the past four years.

The county expects to maintain a low tax rate and low per capita spending and property tax compared to other counties. Each department is presenting its budget during August and September. After the budgets are presented, the County Board will set a preliminary property tax levy for 2012 Sept. 13. After that, the levy may be reduced, but not raised before it is finalized in December.

Department budgets presented Sept. 6 were the Public Health and Environment and Community Services.

The core functions of the public health department are to protect the environment, prevent infectious diseases, promote healthy communities, prepare for emergencies and assure access to health care. These are carried out through managing solid and hazardous waste, food and water protection, home visits, immunizations and infectious disease investigation, and chronic disease prevention.

The department's proposed budget for 2012 is for \$13.7 million, which is a 1 percent decrease in the department share of the county property tax levy, and a 3 percent decrease in other revenue the department receives. It will result in an 8 percent decrease in the amount the department pays in wages, direct payments and operations.

The majority of the department's budget – 62 percent – is spent on the environment, in such areas as waste management. The next largest amount, 15 percent, is spent on healthy communities initiatives, such as chronic disease prevention and the prevention of tobacco use and the use of illicit drugs. Almost half of the department's revenue is received from the County Environmental Charge, which is a charge placed on garbage collection service.

Participation in the county's household hazardous waste and electronics collection continues to grow, as do home visits, the number of licensed establishments monitored, and the number of infectious disease investigations.

Future challenges include reducing the burden of chronic diseases, establishing strong partnerships with community organizations, keeping up with the demand for food, beverage and lodging licenses and inspections, and the increase in the number of non-compliant septic systems in the county.

The Community Services Department will see a reduction in its 2012 proposed budget of almost \$1.9 million in both revenue and expenditures. Almost half of the department's budget – 44 percent – is from the county's property tax levy, a

third is from federal sources, and 15 percent is from state funds.

Forty percent of the department's budget is used for social services; just more than 25 percent pays for economic support; and just more than 20 percent pays for mental and chemical health services.

Changes in state law to reduce state funding will have an impact on how the programs are funded in the county:

- the Minnesota Family Investment Program Consolidated Fund reduced by \$128,000;
- the Child Support State Incentive Grant reduced by \$70,000;
- Adult Mental Health Grant reduced by \$128,700;
- cost share for new sex offender commitments increased from 10 percent to 25 percent effective Aug. 1.;
- Consolidated Chemical Dependency Treatment Fund cost share increased from 16 percent to 23 percent;
- 1.5 percent waiver case management rate reduction;
- Vulnerable Children and Adults Act funds reduced by \$282,000.

Highlights in the department are in veterans services, which serve the 17,000 veterans who live in Washington County; the office expects to open 900 new cases in the coming year. The WorkForce Center had 29,342 visits to its resource room in 2010, and expects to train 725 participants in 2012.

It is expected that 17,100 people will receive medical assistance in 2012, 6,950 child support cases will be managed, and 5,200 food stamp cases will be managed. Food support and health care cases have grown since January 2008. Food support grew from 1,856 to 4,048; health care grew from 6,546 to 9,395. The department's child support program collected \$26,500,000 from 6,950 child support cases.

Annually, the department provides or oversees services to:

- 310 children who receive mental health services;
 - those in need of detoxification services, which have 550 admissions annually;
 - 1,200 active cases for those with developmental disabilities, and an increasing need to serve those with autism spectrum disorders;
 - 1,000 elderly or adults with disabilities who are receiving "waiver" or care that is an alternative to institutions;
 - 560 elderly who reported abuse or neglect, a quarter of whom report financial exploitation;
 - 670 children who were the subject of reported abuse or neglect which were assessed or investigated.
-